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Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

The Fallacy of the “Framework Hypothesis”

It’s no surprise that the creation account has always been in the crosshairs of the enemy. Since the Garden of Eden, God’s Word has suffered and withstood many aggressive attacks, all driven by one scandalous purpose—to cast doubt upon God and the integrity of His Word.

Genesis in particular, has been a favorite target. Many are saying . . . Adam was not a real person, Eden was not a real place, and the talking serpent was not a real tempter. In fact, they start with the word, “day” in Genesis 1. According to the “framework hypothesis,” day doesn’t mean a real 24-hour period of time. John MacArthur goes on to explain . . .

One popular view of creation held by many old-earth advocates is known as the "framework hypothesis." This is the belief that the "days" of creation are not even distinct eras, but overlapping stages of a long evolutionary process. According to this view, the six days described in Genesis 1 do not set forth a chronology of any kind, but rather a metaphorical "framework" by which the creative process is described for our finite human minds.

This view was apparently first set forth by liberal German theologians in the nineteenth century, and was later adopted and propagated by some leading evangelicals, most notably the late Dr. Meredith G. Kline, an Old Testament scholar who taught at Westminster theological seminary.

The framework hypothesis starts with the view that the "days" of creation in Genesis 1 are symbolic expressions that have nothing to do with time. Framework advocates note the obvious parallelism between days one and four (the creation of light and the placing of lights in the firmament), days two and five (the separation of air and water and the creation of fish and birds to inhabit air and water), and days three and six (the emergence of the dry land and the creation of land animals)—and they suggest that such parallelism is a clue that the structure of the chapter is merely poetic. Thus, according to this theory, the sequence of creation may essentially be disregarded, as if some literary form in the passage nullified its literal meaning.

Naturally, advocates of this view accept the modern scientific theory that the formation of the earth required several billion years. They claim the biblical account is nothing more than a metaphorical framework that should overlay our scientific understanding of creation. The language and details of Genesis 1 are unimportant, they say; the only truth this passage aims to teach us is that the hand of divine Providence guided the evolutionary process. The Genesis creation account is thus reduced to a literary device—an extended metaphor that is not to be accepted at face value.



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But if the Lord wanted to teach us that creation took place in six literal days, how could He have stated it more plainly than Genesis does? The length of the days is defined by periods of day and night that are governed after day four by the sun and moon. The week itself defines the pattern of human labor and rest. The days are marked by the passage of morning and evening. How could these not signify the chronological progression of God's creative work?

The problem with the framework hypothesis is that it employs a destructive method of interpretation. If the plain meaning of Genesis 1 may be written off and the language treated as nothing more than a literary device, why not do the same with Genesis 3? Indeed, most theological liberals do insist that the talking serpent in chapter 3 signals a fable or a metaphor, and therefore they reject that passage as a literal and historical record of how humanity fell into sin. Where does metaphor ultimately end and history begin? After the flood? After the tower of Babel? And why there? Why not regard all the biblical miracles as literary devices? Why could not the resurrection itself be dismissed as a mere allegory? In the words of E. J. Young, "If the 'framework' hypothesis were applied to the narratives of the virgin birth or the resurrection or Romans 5:12, it could as effectively serve to minimize the importance of the content of those passages as it now does the content of the first chapter of Genesis."

In his book, *Studies in Genesis One*, Young points out the fallacy of the "framework" hypothesis:

The question must be raised, "If a nonchronological view of the days be admitted, what is the purpose of mentioning six days?" For, once we reject the chronological sequence which Genesis gives, we are brought to the point where we can really say very little about the content of Genesis one. It is impossible to hold that there are two trios of days, each paralleling the other. Day four . . . speaks of God's placing the light-bearers in the firmament. The firmament, however, had been made on the second day. If the fourth and the first days are two aspects of the same thing, then the second day also (which speaks of the firmament) must precede days one and four. If this procedure be allowed, with its wholesale disregard of grammar, why may we not be consistent and equate all four of these days with the first verse of Genesis? There is no defense against such a procedure, once we abandon the clear language of the text. In all seriousness it must be asked, Can we believe that the first chapter of Genesis intends to teach that day two preceded days one and four? To ask that question is to answer it.

The simple, rather obvious, fact is that no one would ever think the time-frame for creation was anything other than a normal week of seven days from reading the Bible and allowing it to interpret itself. The Fourth Commandment makes no sense whatsoever apart from an understanding that the days of God's creative work parallel a normal human work week.

The framework hypothesis is the direct result of making modern scientific theory a hermeneutical guideline by which to interpret Scripture. The basic presupposition behind the framework hypothesis is the notion that science speaks with more authority about origins and the age of the earth than Scripture does.



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Those who embrace such a view have in effect made science an authority over Scripture. They are permitting scientific hypotheses—mere human opinions that have no divine authority whatsoever—to be the hermeneutical rule by which Scripture is interpreted.

There is no warrant for that. Modern scientific opinion is not a valid hermeneutic for interpreting Genesis (or any other portion of Scripture, for that matter). Scripture is God-breathed (2 Timothy 2:16)—inspired truth from God. “[Scripture] never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). Jesus summed the point up perfectly when He said, “Thy word is truth” (John 17:17, KJV). The Bible is supreme truth, and therefore it is the standard by which scientific theory should be evaluated, not vice versa.

As John MacArthur wrote, proponents of the “framework hypothesis” argue the language and details of Genesis 1 are unimportant; they are only meant to show that divine Providence guided the evolutionary process.

But, if that’s really what God intended for us to take away from the first few chapters of Genesis—Providence guided evolution—then why did God provide such exact details with precise language? ~ *Contributed by the Grace to You Staff of Grace Community Church*

Modern Cultic Tendencies

Since the nineteenth century, the U.S. has proven to have a cultural soil that is particularly well-suited to the growth and spread of diverse cultic movements. The nineteenth century alone witnessed the rise of numerous small cults as well as several significant ones, including the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Mormons. A number of factors—discussed in another article in this issue of *Tabletalk*—help us to understand why this happened when it did. But what of our own era? Is there anything in our contemporary way of thinking, or way of living, that is similarly conducive to the proliferation of cults and cult-like tendencies?

On the one hand, several aspects of nineteenth-century culture and religion that contributed to the rise of numerous cults continue to this day. We remain a hyper-individualistic culture that is attracted to populist ideals. We have retained our deep suspicion of all traditional authorities, including the church and her creeds. Within the church, the cry “*No creed but Christ*” (which, ironically, is itself a creed) has not lost any of its emotional appeal. Overly pietistic tendencies in the church continue to encourage the idea of a conflict between the heart and the mind resulting in antagonism toward anything doctrinal or intellectual. These basic misunderstandings led to a severe lack of discernment in the nineteenth century, and to the degree that the same misunderstandings continue today, so too do the same dangers.

The anti-intellectual trend that existed in the nineteenth century picked up steam in the twentieth. We have witnessed the “dumbing down” of our culture. The advent of television, as Neil Postman explains, by itself contributed greatly to the transition from an “Age of Exposition” to the “Age of Show Business” (*Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Penguin Books, 1985, p. 64). The dumbing down of the culture has been followed by the dumbing down of the church.



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Sadly, many churches have surrendered to the standards of contemporary culture and become places of entertainment rather than places of worship. Deeply exegetical and theological sermons have become an endangered species, having been replaced by vacuous therapeutic messages and mindless pop-psychology. In the eighth century B.C., the prophet Hosea declared the word of the Lord to Israel, saying: *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge”* (Hosea 4:6). Such a lament is not inappropriate in today’s anti-intellectual climate in which many Christians have lost the ability to think.

The antipathy and antagonism toward theology that began to gain ground in the nineteenth century also strengthened during the twentieth century. Some continued to argue that theology was detrimental to true “heart religion,” while others began to argue that language about God was simply impossible. Gradually theology moved from the center to the periphery of the church’s life. Christians are no longer regularly taught the foundational truths of the Christian faith and are therefore left vulnerable to cultists and others who cleverly twist Scripture.

As David F. Wells has observed, there is no place for theology where there is no place for truth, and one aspect of contemporary culture in which there is certainly no place for truth is what has been termed “postmodernism.” Postmodernism is difficult to define briefly, but it involves a number of movements in art, architecture, literature, and such that are identified by their rejection of modernism, or “the Enlightenment project,” and its appeals to universal norms. “The animating spirit of postmodernism,” as Gertrude Himmelfarb has observed, “is radical individualism and skepticism that rejects any idea of truth, knowledge, or objectivity.” Obviously, those who reject the idea of objective truth will not be able to discern truth from error. The extreme relativism and irrationalism of post-modern culture is found throughout the church today.

It is important to take into account not only important intellectual realities, but also technological innovations that have dramatically altered our cultural landscape. One such important technological advance is the Internet. In the nineteenth century, if a person wanted to propagate his teachings, he could find places to speak, or he could attempt to have them published and distributed more widely. Without radio or recording devices, the audience for public speaking was normally limited to those actually present (that is, unless someone transcribed the spoken message). If one desired to publish his teachings, he generally had to find a publisher willing to publish his work. In other words, the fact that a person had something he wanted to say to as many people as possible did not mean that he would be able to do so.

Not so today. The Internet has given a printing press to everyone with access to a computer. With the Internet, there are no publishers or editors who decide what will and will not be published. On the one hand, this has provided numerous opportunities for those with good and substantive material to make that material available to a wider audience. But it also provides a way for any cult to propagate falsehood. And the Internet does not discriminate. One can find the works of a Calvin or a Warfield on the same computer that one finds the works of a Joseph Smith or a John Shelby Spong. The user of the Internet alone must discern truth from error, but in the current relativistic and anti-intellectual climate, such discernment is rare.



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The Internet has made it far easier for cult leaders, schismatics, and theological mavericks to spread their message. Those with hyper-individualistic and cultic tendencies can set up shop on the Web and spread their messages around the world. Today, older cults such as the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses have professionally-designed web sites. Theological mavericks of every stripe have set up web sites of varying quality espousing their mutually contradictory interpretations of Scripture. Many of these schismatics use their web sites to set themselves up autonomously as little cyber-popes, regularly pronouncing anathemas on any and all who would dare disagree with any of their idiosyncratic and unbiblical opinions.

There have always been wolves in sheep's clothing. However, the anti-intellectual and anti-theological climate in today's world has made it more difficult for the sheep to tell the difference between wolves and other sheep, and technological advances such as the Internet have made it much easier for the wolves to infiltrate and harm the flock.

In order to counter these realities, the church must first be aware of the dangers. The church must then work to change the patterns of thought that contribute to the spread of cults and cultic tendencies. The church must reject irrational anti-intellectualism and embrace the God whose word is truth. Christians must regain both the desire and the ability to think—loving God with all of their heart and mind. Christians must reject the idea that theology is unimportant, for those who share this opinion are easy targets for cults and other forms of falsehood. Christians must reject the hyper-individualism that has run rampant in the church for centuries. The church is a communion of saints, not an army of one. Apart from the church and its doctrine, its prayer, its worship, and its sacraments, we are easy prey. As members of Christ's body, the church, we must prayerfully support one another and grow in discernment in order that we may recognize the subtle deceptions of the enemy whenever and wherever those deceptions may be found. ~ *Dr. Keith A. Mathison*

The Centerpiece of God's Saving Purpose in the Universe

The doctrines of grace are a cohesive system of theology in which the sovereignty of God is clearly displayed in the salvation of elect sinners. Not only is God acknowledged to reign over all of human history, both micro and macro, but He is also seen to be sovereign in the dispensing of His saving grace. From Genesis to Revelation, God is emphatically represented in Scripture as being absolutely determinative in bestowing His mercy. He is shown as choosing before the foundation of the world those whom He will save and then, within time, bringing it to pass.

The Apostle Paul clearly announced God's sovereign grace in man's salvation. He wrote that, from eternity, God chose, willed, decided, and planned to save some sinners. To elect is to choose, and God chose who would be saved. Paul wrote: "*For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.'*" So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy" (Romans 9:15–16).



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“This is to say, God decides whom He will save in order to display His glory: *“He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will”* (Ephesians 1:4–5); *“For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you”* (1 Thessalonians 1:4); *“God chose you as the first fruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth”* (2 Thessalonians 2:13); God *“saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began”* (2 Timothy 1:9); and *“Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect”* (Titus 1:1).

The Apostle Peter and John taught precisely the same supreme authority of God in the salvation of His elect. Peter wrote: *“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia”* (1 Peter 1:1); and *“Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure”* (2 Peter 1:10). The Apostle John wrote: *“The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come”* (Revelation 17:8).

In this system of theology, the glory of God is central. As every planet revolves around the blazing sun, every truth of sovereign grace rotates around this one fixed point—the glory of God. The unrivaled pre-eminence of God stands at the focal point of this theological universe. That God is to be the chief object of praise in the display of His grace is what energizes this solar system of truth. As the compass always points north, so the doctrines of grace constantly point upward toward the lofty heights of the glory of God.

What is God's glory? The Bible speaks of God's glory in two primary ways. **First**, there is the intrinsic glory of God, which is the sum total of all His divine perfections and attributes. It is who God is—His infinitely vast greatness. Glory in the Old Testament originally meant “heaviness,” “importance,” or “significance.” It came to represent the stunning magnificence of certain objects, such as the blazing sun or the regal majesty displayed by a king. Hence, glory came to be used to describe the magnificent splendor and awesome radiance of God Himself revealed to man. In the New Testament, the word for “glory” is *doxa*, which means “an opinion” or “an estimate” of something. When used of someone's reputation, it means “importance,” “greatness,” “renown,” or “significance.” God's intrinsic glory is the revelation of the greatness of His divine attributes to His creatures. It involves God's greatness and grandeur being manifested to sinners, especially in the salvation of man from sin. No one can add anything to God's intrinsic glory. God is who He is, never diminishing, never increasing, forever the same, the sovereign Ruler, all-knowing, all-powerful, all-present, all-true, all wise, loving, grace-giving, merciful, righteous, and wrathful. It is this intrinsic glory that God delights in making known to His creatures.

Second, the Bible also speaks of the ascribed glory of God, or the glory that is given to Him. *Doxa* also has to do with expressing praise to God based upon the revelation of His supreme majesty. The only rightful response to the display of God's perfections must be to give Him glory. Man must bring the praise due His name. Man must give the worship that belongs exclusively to Him. The display of God's intrinsic glory causes man to give ascribed glory to God. The more man beholds God's intrinsic glory in salvation, the more man ascribes glory to God.



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The Centerpiece of God's Saving Purpose in the Universe

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This, then, is the centerpiece of God's saving purpose in the universe—the revelation and magnification of His own glory. This is what is at the very center of God's being—the passionate pursuit of displaying His own glory for His own glory. This is what should be at the center of every human life—the promotion of the glory of God, that is, beholding and adoring His glory. This is what is primary in the salvation of every lost sinner—the revealing of the glory of God so that sinners might rejoice in the glory of God. No wonder Paul writes: *“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen”* (Romans 11:36). ~ *Foundations of Grace - Dr. Steven J. Lawson*

The Bible Belongs to Every Age

In 1734 and 1735, Jonathan Edwards and the congregation at Northampton experienced a revival. So did many other churches in the Connecticut River Valley in the colonies of Connecticut and Massachusetts. In the fall of 1733, Edwards preached some hard-hitting sermons. One of them, preached in November 1733, has been titled “The Kind of Preaching People Want.” Edwards starts his sermon in the Old Testament, observing that God's people have had no shortage of false prophets, “that always flattered them in their sins.” True prophets rebuke the sinner. False prophets leave sinners “to the peaceable enjoyment of their sins.” He then turns to the desire that people in his own day had for such false prophets. Edwards continues, “If ministers were sent to tell the people that they might gratify their lusts without danger... how eagerly would they be listened to by some, and what good attention they would give.” He adds, “They would like a savior to save them in their sins much better than a savior to save them from their sins.”

Edwards was responding to those of his day who thought they knew better than the Word of God. He also wrote treatises to respond to the academics who thought they knew better than God's Word. The English academic world of Edwards' day was enthralled with the new thinking of the Enlightenment. The deists ruled. They believed that God created the world and then backed away, and now He lets it run along all on its own. They rejected the idea that God reveals His will in His Word. They rejected the doctrine of the incarnation and the deity of Christ. They rejected the possibility, let alone the actual occurrence, of miracles. They had “come of age.” The Enlightenment thinkers and the deists were far too sophisticated to submit to some ancient book.

The philosophers had affected the church. In 1727, a group of independent ministers met in London to debate the deity of Christ. These were the exact descendants of the stalwart Puritans of the 1600s. They voted on the deity of Christ, and the deity of Christ lost. These were men who should have known better. They capitulated to the whims of the day.

Edwards kept up with these developments. He was not a backwoods minister. He had the latest books and kept current with the latest ideas. He saw where these ideas would take the church in the American Colonies. He sounded the alarm. He also saw how his congregation could be so easily led astray by the wrong pursuits. He saw how worldliness crouched at the door, ready to overtake those who so willingly gave in.



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The Bible Belongs to Every Age

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So, he was not in a Puritan bubble. He responded to his culture and to his congregation. He preached sermons and he wrote books—all defending the Bible.

We are not historically situated at the dawn of the Enlightenment as Edwards was. We find our place at the Enlightenment's setting sun. We live in the dawn of postmodernism. We live among those who reject the Bible. We live among those who give in to the clutches of worldliness. Sin crouches at our door too.

So what pastoral counsel did Edwards offer? He pointed his congregation to the Bible. He argued against the Enlightenment thinkers and against the deist theologians based on the Bible. He looked to the Word.

As Edwards noted, the Bible belongs to every age. It is not simply the true Word for the first century. It is not simply the authoritative Word for the first century. It is not simply the necessary Word for the first century. It is not simply the sufficient Word for the first century.

It is the true, authoritative, necessary, clear, and sufficient Word for all centuries, including the twenty-first. Theologians sometimes speak of these as the attributes of Scripture. As the attributes of God help us to learn about God, the attributes of Scripture help us learn about Scripture. The first and foremost attribute of Scripture is its authority. Scripture is authoritative. We again hear Peter Martyr Vermigli remind us that it all comes down to "*Thus says the Lord.*" If Scripture is the Word of God, it's authoritative. ~ **Dr. Stephen J. Nichols - President of Reformation Bible College**

How Does the Spirit Work Through Scripture

Most of the modern discussion about the Holy Spirit focuses on His supposedly ongoing miraculous and revelatory ministries. But despite what the charismatic church would have us believe, the Spirit is not revealing new truth and prophecies to God's people today. Nor is He deploying miraculous power at the whim of televangelist faith healers and prosperity preachers.

Instead, the Holy Spirit's work always centers on the Word of God. But His work did not end with the closing of the biblical canon—today He works through His Word in the lives of His people.

The Spirit Illuminates

Divine revelation would be useless to us if we were not able to comprehend it. That is why the Holy Spirit enlightens the minds of believers, so they are able to understand the truths of Scripture and submit to its teachings. The apostle Paul explained the Spirit's ministry of illumination in 1 Corinthians 2:14-16. There he wrote:



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But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. For “who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct Him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

Through the illumination of the Word, the Holy Spirit enables believers to discern divine truth. (cf. Psalm 119:18)—spiritual realities that the unconverted are unable to truly comprehend.

The sobering reality is that it is possible to be familiar with the Bible and still fail to understand it. The religious leaders of Jesus’ day were Old Testament scholars, yet they completely missed the point of the Scriptures (John 5:37-39). As Christ asked Nicodemus, exposing the latter’s ignorance about the basic tenets of the gospel, “*Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?*” (John 3:10). Devoid of the Holy Spirit, unbelievers operate only in the realm of the natural man. To them, the wisdom of God seems foolish. Even after Jesus was raised from the dead, the Pharisees and Sadducees still refused to believe (Matthew 28:12-15). Stephen confronted them with these words: “*You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did*” (Acts 7:51; cf. Hebrews 10:29).

The truth is that no sinner can believe and embrace the Scriptures without the Holy Spirit’s divine enabling. As Martin Luther observed:

In spiritual and divine things, which pertain to salvation of the soul, man is like a pillar of salt, like Lot’s wife, yea, like a log and a stone, like a lifeless statue, which uses neither eyes nor mouth neither sense nor heart. . . . All teaching and preaching is lost upon him, until he is enlightened, converted, and regenerated by the Holy Ghost.

Until the Holy Spirit intervenes in the unbeliever’s heart, the sinner will continue to reject the truth of the gospel. Anyone can memorize facts, listen to sermons, and gain some level of intellectual understanding about the basic points of biblical doctrine. But devoid of the Spirit’s power, God’s Word will never penetrate the sinful soul.

Believers, on the other hand, have been made alive by the Spirit of God, who now indwells them. Thus Christians have a resident Truth Teacher who enlightens their understanding of the Word—enabling them to know and submit to the truth of Scripture (cf. 1 John 2:27). Though the Spirit’s work of inspiration applied only to the human authors of Scripture, His ministry of illumination is given to all believers. Inspiration has given us the message inscribed on the pages of Scripture. Illumination inscribes that message on our hearts, enabling us to understand what it means, as we rely on the Spirit of God to shine the light of truth brightly in our minds (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:6).



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As Charles Spurgeon explained, “If you do not understand a book by a departed writer you are unable to ask him his meaning, but the Spirit, who inspired Holy Scripture, lives forever, and He delights to open the Word to those who see His instruction.” It is a glorious ministry of the Holy Spirit that He opens the minds of His saints to understand the Scriptures (cf. Luke 24:45) so that we can know and obey His Word.

Of course, the doctrine of illumination does not mean that believers can unlock every theological secret (Deuteronomy 29:29), or that we do not need godly teachers (Ephesians 4:11-12). It also does not preclude us from disciplining ourselves for the purpose of godliness (1 Timothy 4:8) or from doing the hard work of careful Bible study (2 Timothy 2:15). Yet we can approach our study of God’s Word with joy and eagerness—knowing that as we investigate the Scriptures with prayerfulness and diligence, the Holy Spirit will illuminate our hearts to comprehend, embrace, and apply the truths we are studying.

Through His ministry of inspiration, the Holy Spirit has given us the Word of God. And through His ministry of illumination, He has opened our eyes to understand and submit to biblical truth. Yet, He does not stop there.

The Spirit Empowers

In perfect concert with His ministry of illumination, the Holy Spirit empowers His Word so that as it goes forth, it convicts the hearts of unbelievers and sanctifies the hearts of the redeemed.

In evangelism, the Holy Spirit energizes the proclamation of the biblical gospel (1 Peter 1:12), using the preaching of His Word to pierce the heart and convict the sinner (cf. Romans 10:14). As Paul told the Thessalonians, “*For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction*” (1 Thessalonians 1:5). Elsewhere, he explained to the believers at Corinth, “*And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God*” (1 Corinthians 2:4-5). If the Spirit did not empower the proclamation of His Word, no one would ever respond in saving faith. Charles Spurgeon vividly illustrated that point with these words:

Unless the Holy Ghost blesses the Word, we who preach the gospel are of all men most miserable, for we have attempted a task that is impossible. We have entered on a sphere where nothing but the supernatural will ever avail. If the Holy Spirit does not renew the hearts of our hearers, we cannot do it. If the Holy Ghost does not regenerate them, we cannot. If He does not send the truth home into their souls, we might as well speak into the ear of a corpse.

The Holy Spirit is the omnipotent force behind the Lord’s promise in Isaiah 55:11—“*So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.*” Without His divine empowerment, preaching the gospel would be nothing more than dead letters falling upon dead hearts. But through the Spirit’s power, the Word of God is “*living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart*” (Hebrews 4:12).



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How Does the Spirit Work Through Scripture

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Apart from the Holy Spirit, the most eloquent sermon is nothing but hot air, empty noise, and lifeless oratory; but when accompanied by the almighty Spirit of God, even the simplest message slices through calloused hearts of unbelief and transforms lives.

The apostle Paul similarly described the Word of God as “*the sword of the Spirit*” in Ephesians 6:17. In that context, Scripture is depicted as a spirit-empowered weapon that believers ought to use in their battle against sin and temptation (cf. Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). The Word of God is not only the divinely energized means by which sinners are regenerated (cf. Ephesians 5:26; Titus 3:5; James 1:18), but it is also the means by which believers resist sin and grow in holiness. As Jesus prayed in John 17:17, “*Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.*” In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul describes the sanctifying effects of God’s inspired Word—that the Scriptures are sufficient to fully equip believers for spiritual maturity.

In 1 Peter 2:1-3, Peter made a similar point:

Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.

Those who have tasted of God’s grace in redemption continue to grow in sanctification through the internalization of His Word. True believers are marked by a hunger for the Scriptures, delighting in God’s Word with the intensity with which a baby craves milk (cf. Job 23:12; Psalm 119). In all of this, we are being conformed into the image of Christ—a ministry that the Spirit accomplishes by exposing our hearts to biblical revelation about the Savior (2 Corinthians 3:18). He makes it possible for “*the Word of Christ [to] richly dwell within you*” (Colossians 3:16), a phrase that parallels Paul’s command to “*be filled with the Spirit*” (Ephesians 5:18), so that the fruit of a transformed life is seen in the way we express our love to God and to others (cf. Ephesians 5:19-6:9; Colossians 3:17-4:1).

The Bible is a living book because the living Spirit of God energizes and empowers it. The Word convicts us, instructs us, equips us, strengthens us, protects us, and enables us to grow. Or more accurately, the Holy Spirit does all those things as He activates the truth of Scripture in our hearts.

As believers, we honor the Spirit when we honor the Scriptures—studying them diligently, applying them carefully, arming our minds with their precepts, and embracing their teaching with all our hearts. The Spirit has given us the Word. He has opened our eyes to understand its vast riches. And He empowers its truth in our lives as He conforms us into the image of our Savior. ~ *Adapted from Strange Fire - Dr. John MacArthur*



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Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

If you have a birthday or anniversary in February that is not posted here or is listed in error or you do not want to be published in this newsletter, please contact Walt or e-mail him at gwlcfl0415@gmail.com.

Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner February 2023

Birthdays

*Rita B. (14)
Tina K. (14)
Jacob David K. (24)
Brodie L. (27)*

Anniversaries

*Jonathan and April F. (5)
Daniel and Diana K. (11)
Marlow and Wilma S. (15)
Mike and Rose M. (17)
Rick and Peggy G. (31)*

What We Believe - West Suffolk Baptist Church

We hold as our doctrinal statement the 1689 Second London Baptist Confession of Faith, but a short explanation of the significance of that document is in order:

Baptists have always been a confessional people. The faith once delivered to the saints has specific doctrinal content and Baptists, like other Protestant groups, published their beliefs so that their collective orthodoxy might become apparent to all concerned. Since 1689, the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith has been the fountain-head from which all subsequent Baptist confessions (e.g., The Philadelphia Confession, The New Hampshire Confession, The Baptist Faith and Message, etc.) have derived much of their structure and content. Because of its comprehensive summation of historic orthodox Christianity from a Baptist perspective, it is the official congregational statement of faith for West Suffolk Baptist Church.



*West Suffolk Baptist Church
Leadership*

The West Suffolk Epistle is a monthly publication of West Suffolk Baptist Church.

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Please submit information to the editor by the second Sunday of each month preceding publication by e-mail, in person or at the church office. The editor reserves the right to edit for content or space. May the Father be glorified in every word.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions from the contributors to this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of West Suffolk Baptist Church or its leadership.